

Downtown Event and Entertainment District - Phase 1 Engaging on Ideas Engagement Results

ISSUE

Public and stakeholder engagement is an important part of planning for the Downtown Event and Entertainment District (District) and requires a multi-phased approach. The first phase of a five-part engagement for both the event centre/arena and convention centre conceptual designs and the District Plan was conducted in April and May 2023. This phase of engagement focused on understanding what community members would like to see in the Downtown Event and Entertainment District. With the completion of Phase 1: Engaging on Ideas, what feedback did the City of Saskatoon (City) receive from targeted stakeholders and the broader public?

BACKGROUND

At its special meeting held on November 16, 2022, City Council received a report entitled "[Arena/Event Centre Site Selection and Public Engagement Results](#)" and resolved:

"That Option 1 be approved with the future event centre/arena to be located on Site A – Midtown Shopping Centre North Parking Lot."

The purchase agreement for this property was also approved at this meeting.

At its February 14, 2023 Governance and Priorities Committee meeting, City Council received a report entitled "[Downtown Event and Entertainment District](#)," which included a Downtown Event and Entertainment District Engagement Strategy (Strategy).

The purpose of the Strategy is to outline the City's goals, processes and timelines for working with community members in 2023 and 2024 on the following:

- Conceptual Design for Convention Centre
- Conceptual Design for Event Centre/Arena
- Conceptual Design for District Core Plaza
- Indigenous Placemaking
- District Plan

City Council resolved:

1. "That the Administration proceed with the Downtown Event and Entertainment District Strategy as outlined in the report, noting that all final decisions are subject to approval of City Council."

CURRENT STATUS

Public and stakeholder engagement is an important part of planning for the Downtown Event and Entertainment District. Administration has completed the first phase of a five-

part engagement for both the event centre/arena and convention centre conceptual designs and the District Plan.

Pre-Engagement

As a starting point, Administration conducted pre-engagement with a variety of targeted stakeholders. The focus of pre-engagement is to co-develop engagement plans with those that we often struggle to reach to make engagement more inclusive. More specifically, pre-engagement helps to identify engagement tactics, identify specific issues requiring targeted engagement, make sure that timelines work with participants, and identify communications tactics to develop more detailed engagement plans for current and future phases of the District.

Feedback was gathered from total of six Advisory Committees of Council and five business and community stakeholders:

ADVISORY COMMITTEES

- Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee
- Municipal Planning Commission
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee
- Saskatoon Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee
- Public Art Advisory Committee

BUSINESS & COMMUNITY

- Downtown, Broadway and Riversdale BIDs
- Discover Saskatoon
- Newcomer engagement and youth engagement
- Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership
- USask students regarding youth engagement

Phase 1: Engaging on Ideas (Targeted Stakeholders and the Broad Public)

This phase of engagement was about understanding what community members would like to see in the Downtown Event and Entertainment District to help inform the design. Questions were intended to promote brainstorming and creativity.

As a result of the pre-engagement and goals of this phase, the engagement plan included asking questions through three main methods to make it as easy as possible for community members to participate: targeted meetings and workshops; a mall storefront and other pop-ups; and an online survey.

Self-directed 'Engagement Kits' were also created and included all the materials needed for hosting a community-led engagement session featuring a variety of engagement activities. The kits were promoted and available for any community group to download from the Engage Page during April 27-May 18, 2023.

To generate community-wide awareness of the engagement opportunities, a multi-faceted communications and marketing campaign was implemented from late April to mid-May 2023. A mix of tactics was chosen to reach as many residents and stakeholders as possible to inform them of the multiple ways they could participate in

the engagement process. The campaign also shared updated key messages about the project.

More information on the engagement plan and supporting communications activities are outlined in Appendix 1: Downtown Event and Entertainment District Phase 1 Engaging on Ideas Engagement and Communications. A copy of the Downtown Event and Entertainment District Phase 1: Engaging on Ideas Workbook is included in Appendix 2.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The results what we heard from the online survey and targeted meetings for Phase 1 – Engaging on Ideas is outlined below.

1. *Online Survey Results*

Online and paper surveys were implemented April 27 to May 18, 2023. A link to the online survey was made available to the public on the City website. Paper copies of the survey were available at the Midtown Shopping Centre and each public library. Paper copies were also available at EGADZ and White Buffalo Youth Lodge to encourage youth participation. The survey was also included as part of the downloadable Engagement Kits.

A total of 3,134 respondents completed the survey (2,921 online and 213 paper copies). The following provides a summary of the key findings. The detailed results can be found in Appendix 3 Phase 1 – Engaging on Ideas – Broad Public Engagement Survey Results.

Favourable Downtown Features

Respondents were asked what they like about our current downtown. The most common responses include:

- Downtown Saskatoon is known for its diverse range of amenities, such as pubs / restaurants featuring local dining experiences, access to the river and outdoor green spaces, and pathways for active transportation such as walking, biking and hiking. Indigenous culture and art are also highlighted as contributing to the uniqueness of downtown Saskatoon.
- Downtown amenities are a particular highlight for younger residents and those living in the downtown.

Suggestions for Making Downtown Welcoming & Accessible

Respondents were asked what would make Downtown more welcoming and accessible at all times of the year. The most common responses include:

- Safety concerns emerge as the top suggestions for making downtown Saskatoon more welcoming and accessible. Specific suggestions include addressing crime and homelessness. Adding more amenities such as entertainment options and new businesses are also common mentions.
- More accessible downtown parking is important to residents.
- Other recommendations for improving access include enhancing the transit system, creating better walking routes and improving traffic flow

and biking infrastructure. Improved cleanliness of streets and walkways, along with better snow clearing, also emerge as recommendations.

Most Important Features for the Downtown Event and Entertainment District

Respondents identify a range of features that are important with respect to the Downtown Event and Entertainment District. Responses range based on demographic variables such as age, gender and neighbourhood. However, the top ten most important features include:

1. Places to eat (61%)
2. Parking (61%)
3. Well-lit spaces (55%)
4. Places to walk, bike or roll (53%)
5. Places to shop (53%)
6. Green spaces (53%)
7. Public washrooms (51%)
8. Places to buy groceries (50%)
9. Free places for gathering (42%)
10. Outdoor winter spaces (37%)

Design Considerations

Respondents were asked what should be considered when designing the new event centre/arena and a new or expanded convention centre. In addition to consideration for accessibility/traffic flow, public transportation and parking, respondents suggest the City consider the esthetics of the new event centre in relation to existing buildings and surroundings.

Access and Transportation Considerations

Respondents were asked what should be considered when designing how people move to and within the District. Improved public transportation and encompassing rapid transit and other transit methods is the top mention.

Uniqueness of Saskatoon

Respondents highlight the river, outdoor/green spaces and parks, local eateries and Indigenous art and culture as distinctive Saskatoon characteristics that could be integrated into the District.

2. Targeted Meetings/Workshop Results

To be sure unique perspectives, interests and needs of particular community groups are understood and considered, targeted engagement meetings were held. For community groups who may experience systemic barriers to participation in civic engagement, consultants who better represent those communities were contracted to facilitate those meetings.

A total of 10 targeted group meetings were held with a total number of 102 participants taking part in the engagement.

Each group provided some unique perspectives related to interests and needs. However, some input received during targeted group meetings was common to more than one of the various groups, including:

- Spaces need to be accessible and safe for all people, particularly communities that more often experience marginalization.
- Beyond just inclusion, there is a desire to see Saskatoon's rich diversity being celebrated in the District.
- Input was provided on transportation regarding how people will travel to and from the District, as well as within the District. Topics included parking and accessible parking, transit, and cycling.

Appendix 4 - Phase 1 – Engaging on Ideas - Targeted Engagement Results (2023) provides a more detailed summary of the input received from each targeted group.

IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial, legal, social or environmental implications resulting from this report. Capital Project P.02627 – Event Venue Business Plan has a total approved budget of \$6.562M.

NEXT STEPS

Indigenous engagement is a key component of the overall engagement strategy for this project. A group of Indigenous leaders, Elders and Knowledge Keepers to represent First Nations and Métis communities and interests in Saskatoon was established in May 2023. Since the initial meeting, feedback has been gathered on the aspirational themes developed by the technical advisor along with uses for the public spaces, event centre/arena, and convention centre. This information will be referenced as part of the initial designs to be developed. A summary of input received will be shared by email to City Council and will be made available to the public on saskatoon.ca/eventdistrict.

The next step for targeted and broad public engagement will take place approximately February/March 2024. This phase will include an opportunity to provide feedback on the initial designs for the District Plan, event centre/arena and convention centre. An outline of the next steps for engagement are included in Appendix 5: Downtown Event and Entertainment District Engagement Timelines.

APPENDICES

1. Downtown Event and Entertainment District Phase 1 Engaging on Ideas Engagement and Communications (2023)
2. Downtown Event and Entertainment District Phase 1: Engaging on Ideas Workbook
3. Phase 1 – Engaging on Ideas - Broad Public Engagement Survey Results (Includes Online Survey and Completed Workbooks)
4. Phase 1 – Engaging on Ideas - Targeted Engagement Results (2023)
5. Downtown Event and Entertainment District Engagement Timelines

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